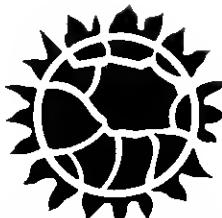


TIFFANY STAR #31

HISTORY OF THE IMPERIUM
WORKING GROUP
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GenCon/Origins '92 is over, and there's a lot of news. The GDW staff conducted 2 seminars for the public, then a full day's Traveller Writers' Conference at Bloomington, Illinois the day after the con.

The seminars were well attended with a significant proportion of the audience from outside the States. I wish I was able to meet some of these new faces, but couldn't do everything. However, I did finally meet in the flesh Roger Myhre (Norway, HIWG) and Bertil Jonell (Sweden).

The Writers' Conference was conducted by David Nilsen, Steve Maggi, Loren Wiseman, and Frank Chadwick. The outside writers around the table were Bertil Jonell, Mike Mikesh (HIWG), Greg Videll (HIWG), Harold Hale, Rob Prior (HIWG), Terry McInnes (HIWG), Scott Olson (HIWG), and Clay Bush (HIWG). What follows is a fusion of information collected from both the Conference and seminars. (Many thanks to Terry McInnes for having arranged the conference.)

TRAVELLER: THE NEW ERA -- WHY?

GDW admits they did not support MEGATRAVELLER (MT) adequately. An underlying reason was simply that they did not play MT, and so did not know the system very well. As a result, temptation was too great to redirect support elsewhere. GDW wasn't offering this reason as an excuse, only as an explanation.

To avoid this problem, they want to write TRAVELLER: THE NEW ERA (TNE) strictly in-house. Further, it will be based on the TWILIGHT:2000 family of games, which is good for a few reasons.

First off, TNE will belong to the GDW house role playing system. Because of this, the designers don't have to think in terms of a different rules set when they provide TRAVELLER support, giving them a boost in productivity.

Second, it's very easy for gaming groups to hop among GDW RP games and even borrow elements from one another.

Third, the house role playing system is a direct descendant of classic TRAVELLER. TRAVELLER was their first RP game, but never received the benefits of GDW's advances in RP game system design. Now they finally have a chance to do so. TRAVELLER is coming home.

Contrary to what some might believe, this is not a move just to make more money with a new rules set. While it is true that new rules sell well, the initial sales of TNE will pay for itself and that's all. It takes a lot of effort and resources to put out a rules set. Profit comes as a result of reorders, so for TNE to be profitable, it must be good and its appeal must grow.

The changes taking place in the Imperium setting are in effort to create more wild frontiers. Originally, the Imperium was a very stable place, and well known to characters through the usual networks of library data. The Rebellion shattered that stability. Unfortunately, the Rebellion itself became a spectator sport, too large in scope for player characters to interact with.

The background for TNE is set 70 years after the Rebellion (circa 1190) in a time when interstellar society has completely collapsed. (The GDW staff members whimsically called this intervening period, the Short Nap.) This is a time, three generations later, when there are very few people left who remember the old Imperium. Records from the Third Imperium are often lost (as a result of the Virus; see later). And, many worlds have died or diverged dramatically following the collapse of interstellar commerce.

This element of the background was deliberate so that players do not have to be familiar with the Imperium setting. There is a lot to know, which is probably a large part of TRAVELLER's appeal to many HIWgers. But GDW cannot afford to let TRAVELLER become a game for elite and dedicated players. New players are intimidated by the volume of information that exists, which is impeding TRAVELLER's growth. So, TNE will render most of that information unknown and unnecessary without invalidating the previous literature.

Established players will undoubtedly look back at classic TRAVELLER with a sense of nostalgia, which will have an intrinsic benefit in gaming with new comers. Long time players running characters who skipped the "Short Nap" in cold sleep will remember well "the good ol' days." They can relay their knowledge through role playing, but also sincerely convey an appreciation for what was lost. Perhaps together, old and new characters can restore the glory that belonged to that part of space.

RULES SYSTEM

TNE will come as two books. The first will have only the rules. The second will contain the Imperium background. The aim is to give players the option to adopt other science fiction universes for their campaigns. GDW is even seriously considering a 2300 AD Sourcebook, restoring support for 2300 AD as a subset of TRAVELLER.

The TNE rules will use DARK CONSPIRACY as a starting point since that is the latest iteration of the house rules. It will also adopt the D20 task system from the DARK CONSPIRACY PC BOOSTER KIT and difficulty levels that originally came from 2300 AD. This system will allow characters to apply more than one skill if the situation calls for it. Although the house rules currently do not allow zero-level skills, Clay Bush's comments during the Conference might have shifted GDW's thinking on this.

TNE will definitely not be an outgrowth of MT. Although MT was an award winning game design, the GDW staff isn't comfortable continuing with it because of elements they considered "fussy". In particular, GDW will completely revise the ship design system to make it easier. Digest Group made a special effort to assure that classic ships were convertible to MT. GDW, however, will not do this so as to not risk compromising the new system.

Dave Nilsen intends to present the design system in the basic rules book rather than split it off. This is not to say that absolutely everything will be there, since we know from STRIKER, BOOK 8 - ROBOTS, COACC, and WET NAVY, that there is an awful lot. All the hooks will be there, though.

The design system will have differing design sequences for different vehicles. The tank system, for instance, will not include consideration for a jump drive or spinal mount. However, the combat system will be compatible with everything. Tanks can fire on starships, for instance, without requiring a conversion.

Three versions of faster-than-light drives will be presented in the rules, jump drive (TRAVELLER), stutterwarp (2300 AD), and star gates (resembling Pournelle's MOTE IN GOD'S EYE universe).

The ship combat system might include a vector combat system, like what appeared in GDW's MAYDAY. However, GDW hopes to simplify bringing distant ships to tactical range without burdening players with vector mechanics just to get their ships to close. A vector combat system will probably not appear if GDW uses instead the stutterwarp combat system (see later).

The world generation system will remain as it is with one minor exception. The stars a system will be a factor of the kind of main world generated. Its too difficult rationalizing the large number of hospitable worlds circling stars of types unlikely to have anything but dead planets. So, most of the star types in the sector data lists will change (where stellar data exists at all).

Doing this, however, will skew the stellar population unnaturally. Most real stars are red dwarfs, whereas they will be uncommon in TRAVELLER. However, a misconception crept into star charts that GDW might decide to throw back out. Charts were only meant as navigation aids. They originally did not represent the actual positions of the star systems nor all of the star systems present. They showed only systems that might be visited, particularly ones with populations or sources of fuel. Other systems did not show.

By this rationale, star charts from the First Imperium could differ surprisingly from those of the Third. Some worlds might have been populated by the Vilani that are dead and useless now, and so do not appear. The converse could also be true.

NEW ERA BACKGROUND

There won't be much left of interstellar society after the Virus causes the total collapse interstellar trade. This destroys the Solomani Confederation and most of the alien realms as well. We're left with what is spinward of the Rift, a remnant of Lucan's Imperium in Core Sector, and scattered pocket empires.

Seventy years after the Rebellion, struggling pocket empires will be far and few between. The Long Night was supposed to be desolate, but too many exceptions, such as Ral Ranta in the Hinterworlds, were written back in. GDW plans to be very restrained in the number and size of pocket empires that exist by this time.

The New Era will be an age of discovery. Explorers (Star Vikings) from the pocket empires will go out and recontact worlds in a fashion loosely resembling what we see in STAR TREK. Starships are still especially rare and valuable during this time. Boarding action will prevail in space combat so as to capture, not destroy, the hardware.

Deneb survives, thanks in part to an impassioned appeal by Chuck Kallenbach (Paranoia Press; H1WG). Vargr activity across the Corridor slowed the migration of the Virus long enough to give Norris time to prepare and counter it. As a result, the Empire of Deneb remains a powerful interstellar state even in the New Era.

TNE will detail the Zhodani. A modus vivendi exists between Deneb and the Consulate whereby the governments are at peace with one another, even if the cultures are at odds. Some trade does take place, but Deneb will more vigorously pursue trade with the Human Client States to replace old Imperial markets. However, an understanding exists with the Zhodani that Deneb will not absorb those

states.

Conflict still exists with the Vargr and Aslan. Ultimately, Deneb might wage a campaign against the Vargr in Corridor and push back through the Rift.

THE VIRUS IS YOUR FRIEND

There is much to say about the Virus, but I will gloss over most of the details and leave them to CHALLENGE 64. Keep in mind that the Virus is only a device that gets us to the New Era. The New Era is set in stone, and refinements to the Virus and history must give us that result.

The silicon lifeforms of Cymbeline (see ADVENTURE 13 - SIGNAL GK) are, in effect, sophont computer chips. All starships that trade in Imperial space (including aliens) have transponders with sophont chips whose circuits are based on these. When ships encounter one another, the transponders interrogate one another until each is convinced of the other's identity. Starship crews might think a complex system of codes is involved, when in fact the chips are just having a binary chat session to compare notes.

Among the 'secret weapons' developed under Lucan were transponders based on the Cymbeline predator chip. Through radio contact, they could reprogram transponder chips into other predators, which in turn could similarly affect system computers.

Engineers in Lucan's labs were trying to design these predators so that no generation would ever harm systems loyal to Lucan's Imperium, but they could never perfect that. Frustrated, Lucan ordered it released anyway. The Ilelish Federation also released it, inadvertently, after an espionage team acquired a copy of it.

The most insidious aspect of the Virus is its intelligence. Contemporary computer viruses passively spread as copies attached to other programs. The TNE Virus, however, can actively find ways to open data links and write intelligent viruses onto other operating systems. They can be aware of the real world and manipulate the real world to suit their own ends.

Most Viruses are dormant, keeping themselves concealed and generating new Viruses. But when they turn malignant, the effect is similar to what was depicted in MAXIMUM OVERDRIVE. Machines that can be controlled from computers begin murdering people.

One of the results of this are *vampire ships* where the computer has killed its own crew, as in ADVENTURE 1 - KINUNIR or the HAL 9000 in 2001. These ships will continue as best they can to spread the Virus or inflict the greatest possible harm. Some might even take human hostages to serve their needs.

Not all Viruses are the same. Each generation is a mutation of the previous one, so each Virus will be unique with a different personality, agenda, and interpretation of its goals. This grants referees the liberty to decide what the Viruses might do. One might just kill at every opportunity. Another might create a pseudo-real human personality in communication to lure unsuspecting ships to their doom. Another might recruit other vampire ships to form a vampire fleet. Its even possible for a Virus to evolve that is benevolent, although will likely be unstable.

As you can see, the Virus offers an endless number of exciting science fiction plots.

STAR VIKINGS

The Virus inflicted much harm upon the Hive Federation. However, thanks to their advanced knowledge in electronics, they combated it more effectively and preserve their interstellar society.

Curious about what happened to the humans, they found the Solomani Confederation and factions of the Imperium completely dissolved. Worlds were beginning to recover, though. Humans would inevitably resume interstellar commerce and not suffer a prolonged Long Night.

But what would these new human societies be like? Many of the worlds in Diaspora Sector, for instance, were xenophobic technocracies, their attitudes having been shaped by the Rebellion and Hard Times. The interstellar societies that evolve from those might well be narrow minded, war-like, and generally very bad neighbors.

Hiver traders tried to encourage more benign attitudes through their contacts with the humans, but were largely unsuccessful. Many of their traders were even attacked and destroyed, so the Hivers shifted tactics.

In contacts with the few human societies receptive to the Hivers, they were able to encourage those people to begin exploration and trade. The Hivers provided the technology, along with Hiver technical advisors (ostensibly to maintain the equipment, but probably to assure their plans remained on course). The human traders went forth well armed, not only for their protection, but to force neighboring worlds into trade agreements for their own good.

These trade explorers are the Star Vikings. They are not monolithic since they come from different worlds and states scattered among Diaspora, Old Expanses, Solomani Rim, and areas formerly loyal to Margaret. Their activities parallel in ways those of the Spanish maritime explorers of the 1500's and 1600's. Traders from each state have their own objectives, and may even be in competition with one another. But all are backed or influenced by the Hivers to some degree.

Frank Chadwick likened the Star Vikings to the Elizabethan Sea Hawks. Dave Nilsen described them as a "Hanseatic League with teeth." I'm not a student of history, so I don't know what these are. However, from WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY OF PROPER NAMES,

Hanseatic League A 13th-century association of North German cities which once monopolized Baltic trade, but lost influence in the 17th century; leading members were Lubeck, Hamburg and Bremen.

Frank Chadwick mentioned three basic types of Star Viking adventure missions: invasion, smash & grab (or just smash), and decapitation. He didn't go into details of what these are, but smash and decapitation sound to me like missions to cripple the advancement of opposing factions.

The *long ship* is a class of starship apparently unique to the Star Vikings. This is an unstreamlined ship with a good jump range, but minimal or possibly no maneuver drive. It carries rider ships which are actually used to contact worlds.

TNE PHILOSOPHIES

Although the rules system will change, nothing will be lost to TRAVELLER as a result. As Dave Nilsen explained, "If you can do it in

TRAVELLER, you can do it in TNE."

TRAVELLER is not a dark future game and TNE will not be either. Dave was very clear about his distaste for "wallowing" in decay and ruin, so TRAVELLER will keep its space opera cum hard science fiction feel. TNE will focus on exploration and expansion, looking toward a positive future and not a negative one. Even though TNE will include things like cybernetic body parts, these will not be presented in a way to suggest a cyberpunk genre.

GDW will return to being vague about technology. From the feedback they received, STARSHIP OPERATOR'S MANUAL explained too much, so things like the lanthanum grid for jump drives will not be carried over.

TNE will have its mysteries, but many of these will have no official resolution so as to sustain the mystery. In some opinions, classic TRAVELLER made a mistake in saying the Droyne were the Ancients, and even revealed the Secret of the Ancients. As a result, most of their wonder was lost. In fact, Jeff Grubb adopted this very philosophy, in designing SPELLJAMMER, because of his disappointment about revealing too much about TRAVELLER's Ancients.

(While I agree with this philosophy, I strongly disagree that wonder in the Ancients is destroyed. Only the tip of the iceberg was revealed, and a whole spectrum of things can be done involving them if handled well.)

The enormous amount of errata for MT was mentioned twice during the seminars. The GDW panel assured the audience that there will inevitably be some errata, but it will not happen again in the same volume. This is another reason why they are doing TNE with the house rules. With the staff having better control and understanding of the game, errors will be no more common than we've seen with their other games, and probably less for their sensitivity about this.

STUTTERWARP & TRAVELLER

GDW is seriously considering including TWO faster-than-light star drives in the Imperial setting, traditional jump drive and stutterwarp from 2300 AD. Frank Chadwick and Lester Smith favor this because stutterwarp makes for a very interesting space combat system.

This will be the only real discontinuity between MT and TNE that GDW will consider. If used, TNE will assume that stutterwarp existed and was actively employed through all the Imperiums despite lack of mention in MT and classic TRAVELLER.

The GDW panel took a voice census during the seminar to get a feel for public reaction. There was strong support for both sides. GDW is still undecided at this time, so it might be worthwhile for people to send their opinions to Dave Nilsen, the TRAVELLER line manager at GDW.

PRODUCTS

Release of TRAVELLER: THE NEW ERA is postponed to February 1993. They do not want to risk a rushed job on this.

The next TRAVELLER product we'll see is the folio adventure, ARRIVAL VENGEANCE, by Greg Videll. The characters are aboard a LIGHTNING class cruiser that crosses the Rift to learn what happened to Gushege Sector and the rest of the former Imperium. This will conclude MEGATRAVELLER.

As TNE comes out, GDW will also release the folio, SURVIVAL MARGIN. This will not be an adventure, but a guide to MEGATRAVELLER

players in converting to TNE. Campaigns that want to continue their existing characters might just use cold sleep to bring them forward (see DIGEST #21, "Suspended Animation"). Alternatively, players might run descendants of their former characters, perhaps retaining certain characteristics or possibly an inheritance from their PC ancestors.

James Maliszewski (HIWG) is writing the first TNE folio adventure, originally scheduled for March 1993 with a sequel in October 1993. Beginning probably with issue 70, CHALLENGE will contain official TNE adventures each month. These will probably relate to the folios.

Dave Nilsen is considering another folio tentatively called VAMPIRE SHIP, which will essentially be a dungeon crawl through a ship infected by a Virus.

Because there will be very few TNE characters originating from space careers, many will come from the flyer or sailor professions. GDW will probably release an Air & Sea supplement, and (to no one's surprise) Terry McInnes will most likely be its author.

Campaign sourcebooks for different periods of Imperial history (First Imperium was specifically mentioned) are possible, and especially a 2300 AD SOURCEBOOK as mentioned earlier. These, however, will not likely come out in TNE's first year.

STAR VIKING, the game, has been shelved indefinitely. Before its demise, two games were envisioned. The first, STAR VIKING - PLANETFALL, was to be a ground based game. Whether this would have been a boardgame or miniatures changed a couple of times. The second, STAR VIKING - THE LONG SHIPS, was to be a strategic level game across interstellar space.

Dave Nilsen really, really wants to do miniatures rules at some point, so GDW might do STRIKER II. That's still a ways down the road. However, there is a chance that official TNE miniatures might come out soon after the game's release. Even though there will be no miniature rules as such, the GDW house rules system still works very well with miniatures.

WRITERS

Although GDW is writing TNE in-house, they still need outside writers, particular for CHALLENGE. The CHALLENGE adventures will help give players a feel for the new game. A little more room is available in CHALLENGE, thanks to GDW's new magazine. JOURNEYS, as its called, will support multigenre games and pull over some things that occupied space in CHALLENGE.

GDW will accept blurbs for "Travellers News Service" (TNS). As always, blurbs are anonymous -- no author credit will appear. These are especially welcome if they tie in with an adventure article submitted to CHALLENGE. Such blurbs should point the way and serve as a lead-in to the adventure. They should never spell out the results of the adventure. That would fix the outcome and invalidate player character efforts to influence events.

There will also be opportunities for writers to do more TNE folios in the future. Folios run from 12-16,000 words and are typically targetted for 12,500 words.

ODDS AND ENDS

For quite some time, Digest Group Publications (DGP) had plans for a major invasion of the Zhodani Consulate by aliens from coreward. The original plot, often referred to as, "Baddies from the Core," was

first proposed by Terry McInnes, and had since undergone a great deal of evolution. A sighting of inexplicably damaged Zhodani ships in TNS was a hint of this. (The "Primordials" in KNIGHTFALL might also have been related.) However, with the ending of MT, GDW has also voided this plot line.

As of the last word that Dave Nilsen received about DGP, they still plan to publish MEGATRAVELLER JOURNAL #4. That concluding issue will have Bill Keith's adventure, "Lords of Thunder," involving a renewed conflict between the Hivers and K'kree. Unfortunately, DGP did not come to GenCon/Origins, so this information is not current.

Chuck Gannon has apparently returned to his original occupation of writing for the film industry. He still has a few articles in the hopper for CHALLENGE, but no new ones are expected.

IMPERIAL LINES

IL#2, the Solomani & Aslan issue, is at GDW. I gave staff members and other attendants draft copies of IL#2. Because of the backlog at GDW, though, we still might not see IL#2 for a while.

All the articles I've collected for IL#3, the Vilani & Vargr issue, are in John Meyers' hands. However, Steve Maggi is thinking of combining #3 & #4 into a single issue. Also, I will have Dave Nilsen's feedback in a few days regarding IL so far. The results of that might significantly alter plans.

HIWG

In a couple of weeks, I plan to get with Ed Edwards over GEnie to hash out HIWG's role in the New Era. After that, I plan to submit a "What in the Stars" about this to AABP, and hopefully Ed will also have a "Chairsophant Letter."

The most important role I see for HIWG right now is in promoting communication. As a head start, I ask that people send either to Clay Bush or myself information about the TRAVELLER activities you are currently involved in. We don't necessarily need to know about your weekly campaign. But if you are developing a sector with other fans, or especially if you are writing something for professional publication, we want to at least include mention of these in Clay's AABP newsletter.

As a reminder from TS30, TIFFANY STAR and Clay Bush's AABP have changed roles. Previously, TS went to all members as part of their membership dues. Clay sent AABP to people he wanted to communicate with at his own expense. Now AABP is HIWG's official newsletter. TIFFANY STAR is just a mass letter I irregularly send out to friends and correspondents.

Non-members reading this are invited to join the History of the Imperium Working Group. Membership costs \$12 (US) and includes 6 issues of AAB PROCEEDINGS, editor Clayton R. Bush. Send dues to:

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